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Who is More Humane? An Ethnographic Account of Power Struggles in Jewish-Palestinian Dialogue Encounters

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Author Bio(s)

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Abstract

This study addresses the question of majority-minority relations in situations of intractable conflict (Bar-Tal 2000). The study focuses on processes involved in the majority Jewish group's construction of images of the Palestinian minority group, all citizens of Israel, while participating in a structured dialogue encounter conducted at Tel Aviv University in Israel. In this dialogue, it was observed that negative inhumane images that the Jews have of the Palestinians were notably expressed by the Jewish group in three situations: to cope with distress when their morality was challenged by the Palestinian group; to preserve the Jewish group's superiority and hegemony in Israel; and to preserve or restore the Jewish group's power. The study also examines the gradual processes of change that the Jewish group experienced while becoming aware that dehumanization strategies are practices that preserve dominance. This study contributes to a better understanding of the importance of addressing the iconic representations and images that majority groups hold of minority groups, and suggests the need to challenge the practice of power through the use of these representations and images when facilitating group encounters.

Introduction

This study addresses the question of majority-minority relations in situations of intractable conflict (Bar-Tal 2000). The study focuses on processes involved in the majority Jewish group's construction of images of the Palestinian minority group, all citizens of Israel, while participating in a structured dialogue encounter conducted at Tel Aviv University. In this dialogue, it was observed that negative inhumane images that the Jews have of the Palestinians were notably expressed by the Jewish group in three situations: to cope with distress when their morality was challenged by the Palestinian group; to preserve the Jewish group's ideology regarding the superiority and hegemonic power of Jews in Israel; and to preserve or restore the Jewish group's power. It shows how group interactions involving stereotypical representations of the other can be addressed and even transformed through processes encompassing discussion and mediation.

Under conditions of severe and sustained conflict as in the Jewish-Palestinian case, there is extremely negative, overt categorization, known as delegitimization (Bar-Tal 1990; Bar-Tal and Teichman 2005). This type of categorization based on extreme negative characterization serves to exclude the outgroup from the human family, hence justifying violence directed toward that group.

In the last decade, dialogical encounters have become a common and preferred means of addressing conflicts, particularly in the Middle East, serving as a way to modify hostile stereotypes between national and ethnic groups in conflict (Bar-On and Kassem 2004; Bar-Tal 2002; Salomon 2002). Studies done since the 1990s on encounters between Jews and Palestinians in Israel strove to examine the process itself rather than merely its outcomes. This

research also took into account the social-political context in which it was conducted (e.g., Maoz 2000; Bar, Bargal and Asaqla 1995; Katz and Kahanov 1990). These studies helped develop a new approach to the study of dialogue, attempting to describe and analyze what happens in intergroup dialogue and encompassing an awareness of power relations in Jewish-Palestinian encounters (Abu-Nimer 1999; Maoz 2000; Rouhana and Kroper 1997).

Halabi, Sonnenschein and Friedman (2004) examined a Palestinian-Jewish group process and pointed to the five developmental phases that emerged in the group process including: the initial exploration and declaration of intent; the strengthening of the Palestinian group; resumption of power by the Jewish group; impasse when the dialogue mired down and the reigning atmosphere in the group is one of exhaustion on both sides; and a different more egalitarian dialogue with mutual respect.

Maoz, Bar-On, Bekerman and Jaber-Massarwa (2004) revealed the strategies used by Jewish partners in a dialogue to preserve their dominance and prevent attempts to unfetter the dialogue. Among those strategies, they cite claims of moral superiority via delegitimization of what the other side is saying. Maoz, Steinberg, Bar-On and Fakhereldeen (2002), while analyzing a structured encounter between Jewish and Palestinian university students, pointed to the paradoxical notion of achieving empathy through confrontation. Although they focused their analysis on two participants, they recommended developing and applying similar procedures in additional studies that would enable a more comprehensive understanding of the complex processes involved in the dialogue on the level of the entire group.

Bekerman (2002) analyzed the discourse that emerged between the majority and minority in a students' dialogue group, discourses that shaped the national rhetoric of majority and

minority in the context of a nation state. He showed how this rhetoric directs and shapes the dialogue, through a reshaping of the ethnic, cultural and national identities of the participants. Helman (2002) also analyzed the discourse of a Jewish-Arab dialogue group. She found that when the Jews feel that the values they regard as crucial to their culture and identity—like liberalism, democracy, and humaneness—are under attack, they turn to their reified perspectives to justify structural inequalities between the two groups.

The present study attempts to investigate when the majority group utilizes inhumane images of the minority group, and examines how these images are tied to the power relations between the groups, while describing in detail the processes which encourage the adoption of these images and the potential openings for change in their implementation. First we will describe the participants, the course and the social political context in which it was conducted. Later on the method used is described, followed by the findings and discussion.

Method

Participants

The study focuses on a group participating in an elective course entitled “The Jewish-Arab Conflict as Reflected in Theory and Practice,” offered jointly by the School for Peace and Tel Aviv University, in 2000-2001. Nine Jewish graduate students in social psychology and social work participated; among them, two men and seven women ranging in age from 23 to 36. The Palestinian group was composed of students from various fields in the social sciences and law, either in MA programs or in their final year of BA programs, including five men and four women ranging in age from 22 to 30. We do not think the difference in education levels had an

impact on the group process. The data were collected in accordance with the guidelines of the American Anthropological Association (1998). Participants were guaranteed anonymity in any published results of the study, and permission to record the meeting, transcribe it and publish the results was obtained from every participant in the days preceding the first encounter meeting. Confidentiality has been further guaranteed by substituting the real names of the people with pseudonyms or random initials.

In view of the fact that, for over thirty years, feminist language researchers and more traditional analysts have demonstrated the pervasiveness of gender in discourse and interaction as well as the ubiquity of gender in daily life (Stokoe 2004), a warning regarding expected gender differences is warranted. Though always important, the influence of gender on discourse has been shown to be relevant only when participants in the interactional event are demonstrably oriented towards it (Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks 1997). While the excerpts considered in this paper would allow for an analysis in line with those which take into account gender differences, we do not think it can be demonstrated that participants in the intergroup encounter were demonstrably oriented towards gender categories. Thus, gender analysis of the data is not included in this study.

The Course and the Method of the Group Facilitation

The standard paradigm developed by the School for Peace for courses like the one discussed here is as follows: The goal of the course is to learn about groups in conflict through the Jewish-Arab conflict. There is experiential learning and every fourth session is devoted to a theoretical lecture concerning identity and conflict. Two facilitators (a Jew and a Palestinian) moderate the activity. Participants are asked to discuss any subject of interest to them relating to

the Jewish-Arab conflict. Most of the discussion takes place in a binational forum, with uni-national meetings every third session. The encounter is treated as an intergroup—rather than interpersonal—encounter; the intervention method addresses the asymmetry in existing power relations and links processes occurring in the group to phenomena on the macro level in Israeli society (for details, see Halabi and Sonnenschein 2004). In the course herein, there were 17 meetings of three hours each. Additionally, the students participated in a two-day workshop halfway through the process, where they met with students from a similar course given at another university, and engaged in dialogue together.

The Social and Political Context in which the Course was Conducted

The course was opened right after the outbreak of the October 2000 Intifada. A general strike by Palestinian citizens of Israel (in identification with the Palestinians in the occupied territories) was declared and was followed by demonstrations. The Israeli police responded with unprecedented force and authorized the use of live ammunition against demonstrators—resulting in the deaths of 12 Palestinian citizens of Israel, with about 700 wounded and hundreds arrested. This was perhaps the most severe crisis in recent years in the relations between Jews and Palestinian citizens of the state (Report of the Or Commission 2003; Reinhart 2005; Yeshouvi 2001).

Procedure

A qualitative interpretive research approach was adopted to study the dynamics of intergroup processes dealing with identity, images and conflict (Charmaz 1995); this method emphasizes the detailed description of interactional processes while attempting to capture the participants' own perspectives on the events described (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994; Maykut

and Morehouse 1999). Our analytical process drew heavily on the procedures and techniques of Grounded Theory Analysis (Corbin and Strauss 2008). We began coding (assigning conceptual categories to) emerging phenomena, noting the properties of each new instance of coded data and comparing them to previous instances. We then determined *inclusion rules* for each code and established the properties that each new piece of data should possess to be included in each existing category thus establishing the borders of emerging phenomena. We later tested relationships between phenomena to create *emerging conclusions* while refining our categories with the help of concepts from relevant literature. Lastly, when disproving instances were found, our conclusions were either refined to include them or scrapped. The process was repeated several times, producing a set of phenomena whose presence in the dataset can be supported by an extensive and varied body of evidence. Those phenomena are presented below. Drawing from a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967) we used a constant comparative method for we wished to stresses the importance of discovering theories, concepts, hypotheses, and propositions directly from the data rather than from a priori assumptions of an existing theoretical framework.

The data gathered consists of 65 hours of videotaped activity, all student papers and journals, and semi-structured interviews conducted before the course and three months after its completion. All materials were coded via an open inductive coding scheme (Bogdan and Biklen 1992). This approach was similar to the approach developed by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) for analyzing life stories and addressing psychological and social dimensions. The present study did not use life stories of individuals but rather the story of a Jewish-Palestinian encounter group. The main tool we used in our thematic content and dynamic qualitative

analysis was abduction. Unlike deductive or inductive methods, abduction starts by identifying themes that reappear in the narrative (Maoz, Steinberg, Bar-On and Fakhereldeen 2002). These themes led us to hypothesis construction and testing. Since this study is dealing with a group process as a whole, group theory concepts are integrated in the analyses of the texts in this study.

The most relevant concept adopted from group process theory is the notion of the social unconscious first propounded by Fromm (1962). The term refers to the areas of repression shared by most members of a society. Generally, these repressed elements involve certain contents, of which a given society—if it wishes to function successfully—cannot allow its members to be aware. Likewise Foulkes (1973) attributed great importance to the recognition of social forces and their analysis in group processes and argued that one cannot distinguish between inner reality and external reality. His main innovation was in arguing that the group is not an amalgamation of the unconscious processes of its individual members, but rather has a shared system of unconscious meanings constructed through communications, to which each individual makes a unique contribution. According to Hopper (2001), the term “social unconscious” relates to the existence of constraints, of social and communicational-related agreements of which people are unaware. In the following section we will present the findings regarding the three situations in which the extremist image of the Palestinians was expressed and the processes of change during the evolution of the group process.

Findings

Since some of the findings we will report in the following may also apply to the Palestinian participants we want to remind the reader that for the purposes of this study, we are exploring the attitudes of the Jewish participants in the group.

The Jewish group came to the process with an image of the Palestinian as an extremist. Eight of the nine Jewish participants, in pre-course interviews, said that the Palestinians wanted to kill the Jews, and some noted that “wanting to kill” is an integral part of Palestinian culture, whereas Jews perceived themselves as seeking peace. This self-definition was constructed in opposition to the other:

Ofra (a Jewish participant-J): We were educated from the perspective of trying to reach peace and understanding...but most of the Palestinians are educated in a context of hate, to hate Jews, the biggest enemy, and (are educated) to murder.

The extremist image of Arabs and Palestinians was attributed to the Palestinian group very early in the process:

Ido (J): From the start, really from the first meeting, they said “we are Palestinians” and to me it felt subversive...I said how could [you] be Palestinian. Palestinians are at war with us... When they said “Palestinian,” I heard “terrorist.”

When the Arabs defined themselves as Palestinians, the Jewish students’ image associated with “Palestinian” was, for the most part, that of a terrorist, an enemy.

The Jewish group used the extremist image when it felt distressed in the battle over who is more humane.

At the 6th meeting the Jewish group is talking about the feeling of distress and threat during the last discussion.

Ido: Last time I came out feeling distressed and threatened in the group itself especially when you said how do you feel about terrorist attacks on Jewish citizens and I had the feeling you are not objecting that.

Maram: That we are part of it (cynically)

Ibtisam: Each side uses its own means, you have been also in the army and fought, I do not know if you killed people but you were part of it.

Ahmad: I do not support terrorist attacks on civilians but I do support the struggle against the occupation.

Ido: I ask myself if I do sit here with extremists that would have been willing to participate in terrorist attacks.

Dealing with the moral implications of participating in the occupying army is very difficult for the Jewish group and a way out of this moral distress is to blame the Palestinians for supporting terrorism and ignoring the complex point of view that they have just presented.

At the six first meetings of the process, as the Palestinian group repeatedly raised the subject of the injustices that the State is perpetrating on Palestinians, the Jewish group reported feeling embattled on the moral plane:

Dalia (J): First of all, it's very disturbing in the sense that you know there's discrimination, but when you know someone personally and he tells you that he can't rent an apartment because he's an Arab...I mean, you don't really want to think that this is your country that you're living in, but that's the situation...that makes [me] feel bad, feel in despair, feel, uh...helpless against the system. Okay,

they are discriminated against; what can I do? Nothing... And guilty of course, that things like that happen.

The distress was evident in expressing despair, guilt and helplessness.

In discussions during the first part of the course, the Jewish group paid attention only to the assertive or more militant voice of Adnan, a Palestinian participant who was confrontational, while neglecting other, more moderate Palestinian voices:

Ido (J): We are constantly hearing the dominant and aggressive voice and we aren't hearing the other voices and we have reinforced this. We got hung up on this dominant aggressive voice and we responded and created this, and that's what is happening now, we the Israelis listen only to the aggressive voice out there, to the terrorists.

The Jewish group wanted to empower this militant voice and thereby to construct it, perhaps to avoid dealing with its own immorality as reflected in descriptions of the injustices of the occupation. This voice seemed like the authentic voice of the Palestinian group. The process of focusing on the more militant voice is mutual; the Palestinians, too, focused on the nationalist or militant voices in the Jewish group.

One way for the Palestinian group to regain a humane image was via a vision or fantasy offered by them with the following scenario: if the roles were reversed and the Palestinians were to become the dominant majority and rule Palestine, they would behave more humanely toward the Jews than the Jews have behaved toward them.

Adnan (a Palestinian participant-P): The bottom line is that we don't reject Jewish existence, I mean if, after this war we have described now, a Palestinian

state were to arise, there would be no talk of transfer of the Jews; maybe, or so I believe, they would also give the Jews the option of either leaving this country or actually remaining and being citizens of the Palestinian state.

Ronen (J): Adnan, but you are prettifying things, you in other words want to say no, they can't exist.

Ayelet (J): What is all this about our having power? This is really about how they hate us.

We see here a breakdown in communications into two parallel discourses with no point of intersection between them. Entertaining the fantasy of the situations' being reversed, with the Palestinians as the ruling majority, evoked for the Jews the specter of nullifying their national existence. The possibility that the Palestinians, having become strong (the way the Jews experienced them as strong in the group process), would behave humanely toward the Jews, was not perceived as a possible scenario at this stage, perhaps because it contradicted the Jews' inhumane image of the Palestinians.

Palestinian attempts to rehabilitate the Jews' image of them, restoring their (Palestinian) humanity, even via fantasy, was mirrored back to the Palestinians as inhumanity by the Jewish group. The imagery was more powerful than stated intentions or circumstances, hence the Palestinians' hypothetical statements were perceived by the Jewish group as a real Palestinian wish, a declaration of war.

Ido (J): If the vision is that the State of Israel turns into Palestine – that's war. We can stop this whole discussion right here.

We found an example of a similar response in the 8th meeting:

Noor: Maybe the power of the Arab group here, the Palestinian group, [is] to bring things, like, to the same level, and you feel that there's a group here that has rights... Maybe you have that sense of a threat.

Ayelet: But on the outside, I want very much to give rights to the Arab group. But I feel that you (the Palestinians) don't give me rights; let's say I feel that, if it were the other way around and you were the ones ruling, you would kill us, like.

Walid: Why do you think you're more human? Do you feel you are more human?

Ayelet: I don't feel you are acting humanely toward me.

Noor: I think that if you were on the outside, in the same circumstances, the same situation...[where] we have power and we are expressing our wishes and battling for our rights, you would behave the same way there too.

This dialogue illuminates the connection between the threat, the dehumanization, and the power relationships. The association that came to mind for Ayelet was that, were the Palestinians in reality strong like the Palestinians in this group, they would kill the Jews or kick them out of the country. A strong, assertive Palestinian group evoked images of massacre. The Palestinians' strength, manifested in assertive speech, the expression of anger, and equality in the process from the standpoint of the power relationship in the room, connected with the existential threat and made the Jews feel weak. Via the inhuman images of Arabs harbored by the Jews, the threat was associated with killing and annihilation.

When the struggle over “who is more humane” was at its height, processes of mutual delegitimization occurred. Each group proffered examples of the inhumanity of the other group, and the dialogue escalated in intensity. Usually the process of dehumanization was not mutual

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and was expressed mainly by the Jewish group toward the Palestinian group, but in this specific phase of the process it was mutual therefore we mention it. The Palestinian group confronted the Jewish group mainly with their military service and accused them of being murderers.

Adnan (P): How many Arabs did you murder during your army service, Ido? And you, Sigal, how many Arabs did you murder?

The Palestinians did not let up, and they compared the Jews to Nazis with regard to the injustices of the occupation – a comparison that the Jews took very hard. In this tough battle over who is more humane, the Jewish group proffered images of the Palestinians as murderers and terrorists.

Ido (J): I think that you wouldn't mind being a part of this, that you don't just take sides but would also plan terrorist missions...Am I really sitting here with people who could plan suicide bombings?

At the height of this struggle over who is more humane, the processes of delegitimization were reciprocal.

The differentiation between understanding terror and justifying terror was important for the Palestinian group:

Hatem (P): I don't justify it but I understand the feelings of someone whose house was razed; he spent quite a few years of his life in prison and was tortured by those criminals in the Border Police.

Sigal (J): In spite of all that, it isn't justified.

Smadar (J): He is and he isn't

Hatem: I'm not justifying it, but I understand it. I understand what brought him to do something like that, and besides, he has no past, and he has no future, so he has nothing to fear.

Sigal: So why aren't you justifying this? I don't understand why you-all aren't justifying it? If he has no past and he has no future, why don't you justify it?

Hatem was giving Sigal a hard time. He refused to concede the distinction between justification and understanding, perhaps because relinquishing this nuance would have taken him to an inhumane place where he didn't want to go. Sigal was in distress; evidently it would have been easier for her if they had admitted justifying terror. This admission would have reinforced the inhumane image she had of them, but she was thwarted. The mission of the Palestinian group to preserve its humane image throughout the dialogue proved to be a difficult one.

The extremist image is voiced when the Palestinians demand a civil state.

The second situation that evokes the inhumane image of the Palestinians happened when the Palestinian group at the 9th meeting tried to promote the solution calling for “a state of all its citizens.”

Ido (J): If the Palestinian residents of Israel identify with the Palestinians in the occupied territories who are fighting us and there are suicide bombings that blow us up and hurt us, and opinions become more extreme...the ideas raised here are very, very radical, positions that barely accept our existence here, our right to exist here, so we have to take some kind of stand that defends us, and there isn't a lot of room there for integration, unfortunately. I wouldn't want this, it's not my ideal, but I'm responding to you.

Ahmad (P): When people talk about a solution they are talking about a certain partnership between citizens, you were talking from hostility, like how can I let my enemy...

Sigal (J): What partnership are you talking about here? You are hurting us every day.

Again we see parallel discourses that do not meet. Ahmad tried to promote the solution of a civil state, from a desire to be a part of that state. When this happened, Ido mentioned the image of the enemy threatening its existence and said that therefore it could not accept the civil state as a solution. Ido was aware that justification of continued control over Palestinians did not sound liberal but claimed that he is just responding to the extremist positions that the Palestinians expressed in the group. Later in the group process we have another excerpt on this issue:

Ido: Extrimism we heard here a lot. We have heard that actually we (the Jews) do not have the right to exist in this place, maybe in another place but not here.

Adnan: You didn't hear that from us.

Nur: We didn't say that.

Sigal: You said so (to Ahmad) all the time you speak about bi-national state.

The extremist image served as a tool to restore the power of the Jewish group.

One incident in the life of the group illustrates particularly well how images of Palestinians as extremist, vitriolic, and uncivilized were imposed on the Palestinian group in the encounter – and how this worked to restore the power of the Jewish group and weakened the Palestinian group. The incident occurred during the inter-university weekend workshop, which brought together students from the course

examined here (University A) and students in a similar course at another university (University B). The workshop took place toward the end of the first semester. At the workshop's opening session, Jews from University A were complaining to the group from University B that the Palestinians in their group were very extremist and were deficient in their ability to empathize, and that the discussion was uncivilized. They reported this in the getting-acquainted session at the start of the workshop and continued in the same vein in the various forums that followed.

Ido: I have a question to you. When someone was hurt did the other group the Arab group expressed empathy? Identification with that person since in our group it didn't happened the dialogue was uncivilized and the opinions were very extremist.

Ahmad: I disagree to this discourse of extremism because it isn't clear what is extremism. I clarified my opinions through the interaction with the other.

The Jewish and Arab participants from University B argued that in their course, the discussions were not as stormy as at University A, but rather were quiet and cultured. The Palestinian participants from University A spoke out in their own defense and explained that the tumultuous dialogue reflected a hard reality rather than the absence of a culture of civilized dialogue. The Palestinian participants from University B responded that their more cultured tactics are more effective in conveying their message to the Jewish group, whereas the militant style was less effective in doing so.

For the Palestinians, influencing the Jews was very important. Ido was arguing that the assertive Arabs from his group had radicalized him. By contrast, the Arabs from University B

had been able, in two hours, to influence him more than the Arabs in his own group had succeeded in doing over an entire semester. He was using this comparison to try to divide the two Palestinian groups and to win over the Palestinians from University B.

Ido (J): I listened to people from University B, to Arabs mainly. I personally was very impressed, and I was more moved than by any other discussion I had or people had with me during the semester we have been together...In our group, we've only had this verbal sparring. My views became more radically right-wing since coming to the group.

The Palestinian participants as well as Jews from University B explain that they indeed were more effective in changing the Jewish group through their gentle way.

Palestinian participant from University B: We also talk about difficult things and sometimes shout but, in my opinion, there is much more of a desire to listen and much more sensitivity to the feelings of the other group.

(J) from University B: There is less anger that makes this possible. With you, it's still terrible, people really attack each other...

Ahmad (P) from University A: I feel strongly that the Arab group from University A is being pushed into a corner and blamed for not listening.

The struggle here was about the question of who is better able to influence the Jewish group. This issue developed during the joint workshop and assumed the dimensions of a serious conflict between the two groups of Palestinians over the most effective tactic for the struggle – courteous vs. confrontational – and this came up in the plenary forum. The Palestinians from University A blamed the Palestinians from University B for lack of national feeling and for conducting

“hummus and falafel” (polite and superficial) encounters – a telling insult in an Intifada year. The Jews from University B defended the Palestinians from their group and testified to major changes they themselves had undergone, but when the Palestinians (University A) appealed to the Jews in their own group to testify that the message had gotten across, the Jews were mostly silent, suggesting a failure to convey the political message. Ayelet (a Jewish student) confessed that the Jews at her university (A) were not all that cultured themselves, and voiced extremist positions too:

The truth is that I really feel that the Arab group from my university has been put on trial here...And I feel that there's some kind of injustice, I mean, that we are remaining silent is because it is very convenient for us to keep quiet, because there is someone who is really doing the work for us, and yells at the Arabs from our group and tell you it's very hard with you, you're very aggressive and it's terrible...By the way, there's something twisted about this, because it's not that we're sitting here miserably while they shout at us; they are getting some very aggressive and extremist responses from us.

Ayelet mentioned that the Jewish group, as the more powerful group, must bear responsibility for its actions. No longer could they hide behind weakness or victimhood, as we saw in the earlier phases of this workshop; instead, responsibility was taken for the majority group's belligerent attitude and behavior. Her words in fact sparked changes among other Jewish participants, who subsequently admitted to a process of accumulating power during the weekend and took ownership of their power.

In the joint workshop, the facilitators and the lecturers of the two groups mentioned that the process in the two groups was quite similar, with only small variations in content and in the dynamics between the Jews and the Palestinians. Statements to this respect were made by the staff of the courses during a session following the plenary session mentioned above; this later session was conducted as a staff meeting that was open to the participants.

The Lecturer of University B (P): It isn't true that the Arabs in University B were moderates, they raised very difficult issues, for example the right of return. I was surprised to see the compromise they got from the Jewish group.

The lecturer of University A (J): I do not think both groups have very different dynamics and I ask myself what was in the process today that caused both groups to polarize and both groups accepted this. I do not think that the Arab group as it was presented here characterized the group throughout the course. There were different stages in the group and I saw also here that with just a bit of difficult dynamics, the group from University B came apart. I think that the processes are very similar... For the Jews from University A this competition happened in a certain moment in their group in which there is a very strong conflict of two very strong forces in the room and it was convenient that somebody else is doing this fight (against the Palestinians from their group). I see here two very strong groups.

The Palestinian facilitator of University B: The processes are very similar in both groups. I remember the first two or three meetings in University B. They were

unbearable. Later something else developed. The processes in both groups are similar.

A week later Nur (P) also related to the processes taking place during the weekend that led to a dramatic change in the power relationship between the two groups; she noted that the Jews were empowered and the Arabs weakened.

Nur (P): I feel that we have reached the point where the balance of power in the two groups has been reversed, as if throughout the semester it seemed outwardly that the Arab group was very powerful and that it was in control of the discussion and dialogue, but now suddenly as a result of some kind of shock, some type of encounter, this balance is reversed and the Jewish group regains its power and the Arab group gets to a situation where I have no power...and it started right after the weekend, I think.

By means of dehumanization, the Jewish group from University A had been able to divide the two Palestinian groups, creating tremendous conflict between them and ending in mutual recriminations about allusions to extremist images in the presence of the Jewish participants. The internal conflict cost the Palestinian groups from both universities considerable power and they emerged from the process exhausted. Meanwhile, the Jewish participants from University A, after numerous sessions at which they felt that the Palestinians in their group were the stronger party, had now regained their power (when we use the term *power* here, we mean the group who set the agenda and speaks more than the other group in the dialogue).

Processes of Change

The transition from a competitive struggle over who is more humane to a different kind of dialogue is a fascinating dialectical process. The seeds of such a change in the Jewish group first appear in the uni-national session which is mainly a reflective forum. Noa's suggestion was to stop generalizing. Here, the homogeneity of the out-group begins to break down.

Noa (J): You say 'them.' I think this is a very dangerous word. Like, because this 'them' often includes 'he,' ...In my opinion, there is some kind of normal division here, they have to be given the space to express this. We don't look enough for this difference.

Thus far, the Palestinian group had struggled valiantly to change the inhumane image forced on them, without success. In the seventh session, they took on a different tactic. The Palestinians offered examples from reality in which Jews were portrayed as humane, perhaps with the intention of making things easier for the Jews. Adnan (P) talked about the Bereaved Parents Circle, whose Israeli and Palestinian members demonstrate together against the occupation – something Adnan saw as a humane act.

Ronen(J): Adnan, do you see this as something good, or bad?

Adnan (P): No, of course as something good.

Sigal (J): But it's hard for you to imagine this. So what does it make you feel?

Adnan (P): It was hard for me actually to imagine that someone might get this idea and especially in this period that they initiated this. Those 300 images that they put in Rabin Square, I just see people Palestinians and Jews, who are trying despite everything to live together and to do something, and they're simply

creating a grounded place with ideas like these, which are very original in my opinion, and very moving, and I don't know what this is doing to me, Sigi [sic].

What stands out here is the astonishment of the Jews at a new type of conciliatory dialogue, introduced by Adnan, whom the Jews had stubbornly nicknamed “the extremist.” The Jews were trying to take hold of this new dialogue to make sure it was really genuine. They embraced this moment of benevolence, because there is nothing stronger, in establishing their identity as humane, than to have the Palestinians acknowledge this humanity—and this, after sessions during which they experienced quite the opposite. The group was exhausted by these struggles and was looking for a way into a different kind of dialogue.

The Palestinians distinguished between their attitude toward the Zionist movement and their attitude toward the Jews as an additional way of changing the image forced on them. Nur distinguished between the two because she wanted very much to refute the extremist image and clarify that there was an ideological disagreement there and not hatred based on ethnic/national origin.

Nur (P): I appreciate the contributions of the Jews, my problem isn't that someone is Jewish. My problem is with the Zionist movement, first of all. And I always hear, Nur, you are an extremist, and you always take the negative side and you always radicalize things, I've heard this. And I think that the Jewish side thinks that Nur hates the Jews because they are Jews. It's not true. I don't hate the Jews, because the bottom line is, we are human beings. But I have a problem with the Zionist movement which you represent and which you support.

The distinction between Jews and Zionists along with the Palestinian acknowledgment of the humane steps taken by the Jews came as a relief to the Jewish participants, who acknowledged the suffering of the Palestinians in the occupied territories in the group.

Sigal (J): Yesterday on television they showed the father of Muhammad Dura [Palestinian boy whose father was unable to prevent his being shot] and showed Gaza, I felt, I really felt a kind of sadness. I had a hard time with it. On the other hand, if I hear about a soldier killed or I know a bereaved family, then it's awfully hard for me. That isn't detachment, it's just a kind of acceptance of, like, there are contradictions, and I accept them.

Sigal wanted to emphasize that identification with Palestinian suffering did not mean non-identification with the Israeli side, and did not mean joining the Palestinian struggle. On the one hand, behind this statement may be a zero-sum view, the assumption that more identification with the Palestinians has to mean less identification with her own people. On the other hand, what was new in what Sigal was experiencing was the idea that it is possible to embrace both feelings simultaneously. The different kind of dialogue offered by the Palestinians also created a different dialogue from the Jewish side. Just as there was reciprocity in the escalation of the struggle over who is more humane, there was also reciprocity in the more placatory dialogue.

After the joint weekend workshop the Jewish participants acknowledged that they were the group with the power. Letting go of the role of perpetual victim and accepting ownership of the identity of the stronger side was one of the main components of the change undergone by the Jewish group:

Smadar (J): Suddenly they understood that they lost power. They were very, very weak... and they weren't crying out the way they had been, they were left with this minority-ness of theirs. I had the feeling that maybe it was a happy feeling and somehow comfortable for us, to go back to being the strong ones, but there was something sad about it.

Ido (J): The trouble is, we won't have a partner; we don't want them to fall apart. In facing off with them, we came together, and now they are falling apart on us... I have a kind of lonely feeling, not so comfortable, it's a lot more comfortable to shout.

Sigal (J): I really don't know how this happened. Maybe in the last meeting, suddenly I'm really looking at myself, I really see what shits we are...Really, in every area suddenly it did something to me, like, look at yourself for a second and see how you behave, how you and your people behave, and it was unbelievable.

The Jewish group was having trouble because, again, they found it impossible to forge a clear identity (a positive sense of belonging to their national group) in contrast to the other group's identity while the Palestinians were falling apart. The Jewish group was challenged to define a national identity not shaped in opposition to the other and not via struggle, and it turned out that this was not such an easy thing. Admitting the ugliness of your own group power in oppressing the other is a painful process.

In interviews after the end of the course, one of the most common changes reported by all the Jewish participants was that they did not see the Palestinians as extremists or as valuing human life less than do the Jews.

Ofra (J): We are a lot like them. We are all hot-tempered to some extent and we shout a little. We're all Middle Eastern types...If we think we're better, that their values don't hold life as sacred as we do, I don't think so. We also had our suicide bombers once upon a time. From a more Israeli perspective, it would be easier for me to say that they don't care about their life because look, the mothers send their children to make war and people commit suicide and on our side no one would do that. We've done it, we've done everything, so we could joke and say that we had first claim there...like, been there, done that. We don't hold life to be any holier than they do.

Ofra, who prior to the process spoke about how the Arabs educate their children to hate while Israelis educate for peace, evidently modified her position. The value of life was now held to be equal among both peoples, and she felt that the differences at that point came from the different reality in the lives of occupier and the occupied and not as moral and cultural inferiority in the Palestinian culture. These insights developed among the participants during the last third of the course and they were part of the process of taking responsibility for their power, as discussed here earlier.

Ayelet described the changes in the Jewish group's stance of cultural superiority.

Ayelet (J): Now their culture does not seem as different from ours. I mean they are basically students like we are, and we all take exams. Before, I thought it was

this culture like the Bedouin. What stands out more for me is the situation they are in as opposed to the situation we are in, and not the cultural markers, but that they are in a situation of the minority, of occupation, of a very hard daily reality...As if it were natural to say that we accord more value to human life, and these are things I grew up with, that they have this exalted goal, and martyrs, and we are willing to send back masses [of prisoners] for just one captive [of ours], as if the value of human life for us is very, very strong. But on the other hand, we also have this “to die for our country.” Before, I was less aware of their pain, the mothers’ pain for their children. Today, I don’t know, it’s hard for me to see it that way.

Before the course began, there was a hierarchy of values in the way the Jewish students perceived the two cultures, and they felt more humane than the Palestinians. Gradually, all the interviewees developed an understanding of the context in which things were taking place; their inhumane images changed, and they accepted the idea that the Jewish-Israeli side has some responsibility for the situation.

Discussion and Conclusions

A group process by self-selected students over a series of workshops allowed us to capture the process by which people position themselves in opposition to one another and also let us see how, over the longer term, change might happen. The Jews’ extremist image of Palestinians existed prior to the process; these images are acquired via powerful socialization processes in Jewish Israeli society (Bar-Tal and Teichman 2005). The question that concerned us in this study was not whether the extremist image existed, but rather at what points did the

Jewish group choose to use it and for what purpose, and what processes occurred in the group through which this image was strengthened or weakened.

The rationale for Jews labeling the Palestinians in the group as ‘the enemy’ offered itself in the first meeting of this joint workshop, when Palestinians described themselves as Palestinians and not as Israeli Arabs. The image of the enemy ascribed to the Palestinians by the Jews protects their self-concept of being more moral than the Palestinians. Constructing identity through dialogue is an anticipated and natural development in encounter focusing on the inter-group dimension (Suleiman 1997). This process was perceived by the Palestinians in the group as a positive process of shaping their national identity, of empowerment, and as part of the struggle to change the situation. They emphasized their Palestinian identity also as a way of protesting Jewish hegemony in the State. The Jews designated this self-definition as subversion, thereby delegitimizing it. Evidently the life space permitted by the Jews to the Palestinians, within which they are allowed to express, develop, and strengthen their national identity and still remain human, is limited.

Oakes (2001) noted three crucial conditions for transforming a categorization into a bias:

- (a) Activating the category: In our case, the fact of the encounter with the assertive, strong Palestinian group that defined itself as Palestinian provided the catalyst to activate the category;
- (b) The entire concept is relative to the context: Here, the negative images arose in three situations in the majority group: to cope with distress, to preserve its superiority and hegemony, and to preserve or restore its power;
- (c) The process is circular and happens via social discrimination: In our case, the will to preserve the discrimination constituted a reason for raising the negative and inhumane images of Palestinians, and the inhumane images provide justification

for continuing the discrimination. Bar-Tal and Teichman (2005) also noted the circularity in processes of delegitimization of Palestinians in the Israeli reality.

The statements by Palestinian participants about the actions of the Israeli army in the occupied territories and about discrimination within Israel caused distress in the Jewish group. These statements represented a threat to their perceived moral values. Raising the image of extremist Palestinians lessened the difficulty while providing a justification for the situation (Sonnenschein, Bekerman and Horenczyk 2010).

The Jews found themselves torn inwardly between their values of equality and justice, and the tale told by the mirror held up by the Palestinian group, where the image of the society reflected is inconsistent with the Jews' own liberal values. Delegitimizing the Palestinians freed the Jewish group briefly from having to cope with this inner conflict.

Findings in the present study suggest that the resolution for this inner conflict in the Jewish group was a two-stage developmental process. First, exaggeration of the cultural differences emerged, ascribing inhumane images to the Palestinian group, along with a defense of the group's internal values – preserving the state as Jewish; we saw this in the first half of the course. When the Jews' liberalism was challenged, they turned to essentialist concepts linking nationality and culture (Helman 2002). Later in the process, when the Jewish participants acknowledged that they, the Jews, are the powerful group and when they were aware of racist elements within themselves, this pattern disappeared and was replaced by feelings of guilt and self-criticism, along the lines of the phenomena observed by Devine (1989).

The Jewish group also raised the extremist image when asked to agree to equal treatment for Palestinian citizens of Israel. A similar observation was made by Bekerman, Maoz and

Sheftel (2006) among Jewish facilitators who conduct inter-group encounter. They claimed that even in the most ideological, emancipatory setting, the hegemonic forces hold sway. When the Palestinian group asserted its right to full civic participation, and the Jews were asked to relinquish their hegemony, they talked about the alleged “support for terror” by the Palestinians in the group. The discourse of national security breeds the perception of the stereotypical Arab as one whose first priority is to harm the Jews at all times, regardless of costs and benefits (Rabinowitz 1992).

In fact, the Jews at that specific moment in the group process were unable to deal with the argument that nullifies full civic participation for Palestinians in a manner congruent with their own internal faith, liberal values and equality. This internal conflict was resolved by reference to the Palestinians’ demand to rescind the Zionist definition of the state and turn it into a state of all its citizens, which was portrayed as a demand to do away with the national existence of the Jews in Israel. The Palestinians in the group had not expressed this intention in the group. Palestinians reject the Zionist definition of the state as a Jewish national state because that definition excludes its Palestinian citizens (Rabinowitz, Yiftahel and Ghanem 2000). The Jews interpreted this non-acceptance as a negation of their existence. According to this perception, only a national Zionist Jewish state can enable their existence. Loss of Jewish hegemony in the state was perceived, apparently, as loss of Jewish existence within it. The overlap that the Jewish participants saw between the Zionist identity of the state and their national Jewish-Israeli identity, buttressed by the inhumane images of Palestinians, seemed to block constructive, positive dialogue (that could open up new options) about the character of the state. Essentializing discourses (those which assume that for any specific kind of entity there is a set of characteristics or properties all of

which any entity of that kind must possess) of culture and identity are geared towards the naturalization of inequality and domination and thereby disguise the context of their production and reproduction (Scott 1995).

The Jewish participants could not enjoy playing with the fantasy of reversed roles in the situation. The expression by the Arab group of a vision of a reversal in the situation prompted the Jews into a process of constructing the self which, in fact, is actually done by the other. There may be no recognition that can compare in power with the acknowledgment of our humanity by someone we are harming. This is why the Jews had such intense need for recognition of their humanity by the Palestinians, throughout the encounter process. The Palestinians also exerted themselves to receive acknowledgment of their humanity by the Jews, but as a minority group, they were unable to get this acknowledgment from the other. As a minority group, they suffered from the reverse situation, wherein they got caught in the fixed images of inhumanity attributed to them by the majority group.

Bhabha (1994) has recommended that we no longer look at images, positive or negative, but instead begin looking at the process of surrender that becomes possible in a stereotypical dialogue. To understand the productivity of colonial power, one must understand how its truth is constructed by loci of power, opposition, control and dependency that shape the relations between rulers and ruled. The process that began over the joint weekend workshop was an example of this surrender process. We saw how the Jewish group's perseverance in clinging to negative images of Palestinians gradually subdued the assertive Palestinian group, but not entirely. The Palestinian group was hurt by the images that portrayed it as uncultured, uncivilized and extremist. The Jewish group, perhaps unconsciously, exploited this injured place and

encouraged a split between the two Palestinian groups; this contributed further to the Jewish group's power and to the Palestinian group's weakness.

The question of reciprocity in images is a fascinating one. Oren and Bar-Tal (2004) argue that generally, the delegitimization processes in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are mutual. We believe, however, that one may not generalize from those situations regarding the overall situation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, particularly between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian minority in Israel. In the present study a different pattern emerged: In a situation of escalation of the conflict in the group, there was reciprocity in negative images but when the discussion was more relaxed, and the power relations less equal, the negative cultural images were one-way. The Jews labeled the Palestinians as uncultured, uncivilized and extremist, while the Palestinians did not attribute such qualities to the Jews. This pattern is probably connected with the asymmetrical power relationships obtaining in the country.

Unlike similar encounter groups observed by Bekerman (2002), Helman (2002), and Bekerman, Maoz and Sheftel (2006), wherein the researchers observed a vicious circle—with no way out, with the stereotypes unbroken, and with participants engaged in discourses that help maintain existing ideological patterns of power—the groups analyzed in the present study found their way out of the cycle. Each in its own way, the two groups managed to escape the cycle and develop a critical and dialectic discourse with the other group. This is fully documented on 65 hours of video showing a process that was not restricted to a given time frame and enabled a dynamic of change to develop.

The Palestinian group in the present study finally changed the inhumane image imposed on it, mainly by persevering in the struggle to show the Jewish group the inhumanity of the

occupation and its apparatus of control. Generally, the Palestinians' efforts to demonstrate their humanity nearly always end in failure. The Palestinian group in this case was more successful when it persevered in confronting the Jewish group on the plane of its own morality and was able, as we have seen, to crack the Jews' notion of their own moral superiority. The Palestinians also tried to pull apart what Jews posit as an inherent link between Judaism and Zionism. In the wake of these steps, the Jews' negative image of the Palestinians began to break down.

The change that the Jewish group experienced was a gradual process. At first it was covert, and we saw attempts to break down the homogeneity of the Palestinian group. Gradually the group looked inward and talked about the difficulty of internalizing the accusations made by the Palestinian group. Only when the Jewish group acknowledged its own power, did it permit itself to be moved to change. The Jewish group finally stopped mentioning the extremist image of the Palestinians and admitted to itself, and to the Palestinians, the truth about its own power and about immoral acts and injustices perpetrated by the Jewish majority against the Palestinian minority. The Jewish group also acknowledged phenomena of aggression and condescension that occurred during the course itself.

The Jewish group moved to confront the challenge of defining its national identity, not in opposition to the other, not through a struggle, and not from a posture of superiority—and this turned out to be a substantial challenge indeed. The intergroup conflict serves to reinforce the Jewish Israelis' national identity. When the conflict was less present, there was a vacuum to be filled with new content not based on superiority over, or control of, the other.

The paradoxical notion of achieving empathy or change in deep images through confrontation (Maoz, Steinberg, Bar-On and Fakhreldeen 2002) is becoming clearer in this type

of research. Here, we observed a dialectic process. The Palestinians' insistence on challenging the Jewish group about its morality was influential. Meanwhile, the Palestinian group proffered a few examples in which Jews were portrayed as humane, and the Palestinians drew distinctions between their attitude toward the Zionist movement and their attitude toward the Jews. The Palestinian group may have done that with the intention of making things easier for the Jews. Further research may examine the connection between the strategies chosen by the Palestinians in the Jewish –Palestinian dialogue and the change in the inhumane images the Jews have of the Palestinians.

We believe this study contributes to a theoretical understanding of intergroup conflicts and to an understanding of this type of struggle over who is more humane as it takes place between groups with unequal power both on the global and the local level. The research points to the importance of addressing the cultural dimension and the deeply-held images that the majority group has of the minority group, and of challenging the practice of power by using these images in facilitating groups in conflict. Our hope is that this study will also contribute knowledge useful to those working in facilitating groups in conflict both elsewhere and in Israel, regarding their understanding and interpretation of the processes that take place in encounters of this type, thereby enhancing the professional quality of intergroup encounter facilitation.

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